

any cornice to a shop-front in or before the front wall, or any other of the walls of such building, so that such cornice, or any part thereof, should overhang the public way; and that it was also contrary to the said Act to put any dressings to the windows in the front wall of such building, of which the cornice, or any other part thereof, should overhang the public way. And we do hereby find, certify, determine, and award, that a shop-front has been put before such building, standing up to the public way, so as to encroach upon such public way; and that a cornice to such shop-front has been projected from the front wall of such building so standing up to the public way; and that such shop-front, so far as it encroaches upon the public way, and such cornice, so far as it overhangs the public way, are contrary to the said Act. And we do hereby further find, certify, determine, and award, that in forming window-dressings to the windows of the third, or one pair story, a cornice has been projected from the front wall of such building so standing up to the public way; and that such cornice, so far as it overhangs the public way, is contrary to the said Act; but inasmuch as it appears to us, the said official referees, that the rule in Schedule E, of the said Metropolitan Buildings Act, headed, "Wooden shop-fronts and shutters," has been misapprehended by builders and by many district-surveyors, to authorize, or at least to permit, the projection of shop-fronts and their cornices over and upon the public way, in the cases of buildings built or rebuilt, notwithstanding the rule in the same Schedule E, headed, "Projections from walls of buildings over public ways;" and inasmuch as we have reason to believe that the building in question was built up to the public way under such misapprehension, and that no intimation was given by the district-surveyor in the case, that the building ought to be set back to the extent of any intended projections therefrom, until the walls of the building had been built up, we make no direction as to the irregular projections in question."

The rule in question, if enforced, will produce a bad effect on street architecture, and is to be deplored. Some inquiry into the way in which it will work should be made.

#### MR. A. H. LAYARD'S ACCOUNT OF THE RUINS OF THE PALACE OF AL HATHER, MESOPOTAMIA.\*

THE following remarks will, I trust, be sufficient to give you some idea of this building, the chief claim of which to your attention is its uniqueness. There is no other perfect monument of the same period in existence that I am aware of. The fine ruin below Baghdad, usually called the arch at Ctesiphon, is, as you no doubt know, but a portion of the original building. The palace of Al Hather, however, as far as the ground plan is concerned, is entire. The edifice, too, itself is remarkably well preserved, and I have no doubt that a skilful architect would have little difficulty in restoring it, at least upon paper.

You will see a further account of the ruins, in the ninth and eleventh volumes of the Geographical Society's journals, and that will make up for any deficiencies in the notes I now send you.

But I must caution you against placing much confidence in the speculations, as to the Chaldean and astronomical origin of the city. The remotest date one could assign to the buildings, of which the ruins now remain, would be the time of the Arsacid dynasty (256 a.c.), or Parthian kings of Persia, but I am pretty well convinced that they owe their foundation to the Sassanians (A.D. 226).

Hatra, now called Al Hather, was probably founded, like Palmyra, as a station for caravans, crossing the desert by the great roads which connected Syria with Mesopotamia, Assyria, and Babylonia. The city must have risen to considerable importance at an early period; but its name is, I believe, first noticed in history on the occasion of the effective resistance which it offered to the army of Trajan. Ammianus graphically describes it as "in media solitudine posita," and calls it an ancient city. At the time of Jovian's retreat (A.D. 363), it was deserted, and the ruins which now exist appear to me to belong to edifices constructed after that period. It is probable that after the cession of the provinces beyond the Tigris,

after the treaty of Dara, by the Romans, the Persians saw the importance of Hatra, and rebuilt and strongly fortified the city; for, to whatever people it may have owed its foundation, I entertain little doubt as to the Sassanian origin of the palace, fortifications, and principal buildings now standing. So little is known of the history of the place, that much cannot be added to the above remarks. It is described by most Arab geographers, who preserve the tradition of a memorable siege, which it sustained under one of the Shapours (Sapores), and which attributes its fall to an event, which, however well suited to the genius of eastern romances, would scarcely bear recital here.

By an inscription repeated more than once on the walls of the palace, it appears that this building was restored by Azzuddin, ibn Meaud, ibn Maudud, ibn Tamanki, Atabek of Irak, in the year of the Hegira 586 (A.D. 1190). I am not acquainted with the period of its final destruction. The ruins are now the occasional encamping place of the Arab tribe of Shammar. Their position renders a visit to them at most times hazardous; they were first reached by Dr. Ross, the surgeon of the British Residency at Baghdad, but this gentleman was compelled to leave them after a very hasty survey. He revisited them in May, 1837, as published in the 9th volume of the "Royal Geographical Society's Journal," and Dr. Ross remarks, "That the ruins of Al Hather occupy a space of ground upwards of a mile in diameter, inclosed by a circular or nearly circular wall of immense thickness with square bastions or towers, at about sixty paces, built of large square cut stones. The upper portions of the curtains have, in most places, been thrown down, as have been also some of the bastions, but most of the latter may still be said to be in very fair preservation, each having towards the city vaulted chambers; outside the wall is a broad and deep ditch, now dry, and one hundred or one hundred and fifty paces beyond it is a thick rampart, now only a few feet high, going round the town; and at some distance beyond the fortifications, stand two high mounds with square towers upon them, one on the eastern side, and the other on the north.

In nearly the exact centre of the town stands the grand object of curiosity, whether a temple or a palace, observes Dr. Ross, I shall not pretend to say, inclosed by a strong, thick, square wall (partly demolished), with bastions similar to those of the city wall, fronting the four cardinal points, each face measuring three hundred long paces inside.

The square is, in its centre, intersected from north to south by a range of buildings greatly damaged, a confused mass of chambers, gateways, and one bulk pillar, reduced to about thirty feet. Between this range and the eastern wall appears to have been a clear space. The principal buildings occupy the western side, and consist of a huge pile fronting the east, and part of a wing fronting the north; the ground story only remains perfect, and consists of a range of vaulted halls of two sizes. The whole city is built of a brownish grey limestone, so closely fitted, that if cement has been used it cannot be seen, and almost every stone in the great pile has cut upon it one or more letters or marks, seemingly the builder's number, as they are seen in the midst of broken walls, where they could not have been exposed when the structure was perfect."

Mr. Layard continues,—"The ruins of Al Hather were subsequently visited (in 1840) by Mr. Ainsworth, Mr. Milford, and myself. We were able to remain some hours amongst them, but deemed it prudent to return before we had been able to devote as much time to the examination of the remains as they deserve.

In the month of April last, the chief of the Shammar Arabs being encamped near Mosul, I seized the opportunity to make a second excursion; and having obtained an escort from him, and secured his protection, I was able to spend three days amongst the ruins without interruption. I was accompanied by Mr. Rassane, British Vice-Consul at Mosul, Mrs. Rassane, and a large party of native gentlemen. Al Hather has only been visited by the travellers mentioned above."

Sketches were exhibited of the principal edifices or palace. "The city contains no other building of any importance. The walls and

bastions are in good preservation. They are nearly circular, and about three and a half miles in circumference. The other ruins are principally those of dwelling houses; these are of stone, usually of two stories, with small vaulted rooms, connected by narrow flights of steps.

The smaller chambers of the palace, on the ground-floor, are still nearly entire, and the large halls are so well preserved, that there is little difficulty in conjecturing their original forms.

No traces of the windows, which must have occupied the spaces between the large halls, and above the entrances to the small chambers, now exist, and I am at a loss to know how to restore them. They may have been grouped together and arched, as at the palace at Ctesiphon.

On comparing these two buildings, it will be found that a great resemblance exists between them, almost sufficient, indeed, to prove the identity of the epoch of their erection. Although the palace at Ctesiphon contains but one great hall, flanked by small chambers, the general design of the building is evidently similar to that of the palace of Al Hather. To this day, the mode of construction adopted by the Sassanian kings of Persia, has been preserved in most parts of that country, particularly in such provinces as are exposed to great summer heats, such as Fars and Khuzistan.

The centre of the house is usually occupied by a hall of large proportions, always vaulted, and completely open on one side (generally on the north) to the air. This hall is called the "Aivan," and extends the whole depth of the building. It is only abandoned during the winter months, and is a cool and pleasant residence during the hot weather. The "Aivan" is flanked by a number of small rooms, generally forming two stories. These are used for winter residence, and are at other times occupied by guests and servants.

The whole building stands in the centre of a court-yard, ornamented with gardens, reservoirs, and fountains, and is usually surrounded by a series of apartments used as offices, &c. The palace of Al Hather has three Aivans, but in other respects resembles in its general plan (though, of course, on a very large scale), the modern House of Shushter, in Western Persia. The dependent buildings, which surrounded the palace at Ctesiphon, have long been buried in ruins—scarcely any traces of them remain—but it is possible that the "ensemble" was originally such as above described.

It will be remembered, that the palace at Ctesiphon was constructed of brick, while that at Hatra is built entirely of brown stone. The height of the arch of the great hall at Ctesiphon is actually 106 feet from the ground, which may be somewhat raised by the ruins, whilst that of the outer hall of Al Hather could scarcely have exceeded 60 feet.

The Aivans were furnished with great luxury and splendour. It was probably to the Aivan at Ctesiphon, still standing, to which appertained the magnificent carpet, found by the Arab conquerors on the sack of the city.

This carpet, as stated by Gibbon, was of silk, 60 cubits square, a paradise or garden depicted on the ground; the flowers, fruits, and shrubs were imitated by the figures of the gold embroidery, and the colours of the precious stones, and the ample square was enriched by the variegated and verdant border.

Both at Al Hather and at Ctesiphon, the rings and nails to which lamps and tapestry were suspended, are found on the walls and ceilings. I was unable to find any remains of the capitals of the columns and pilasters. It is probable that a simple cornice, with an ovolo or some such ornament, ran round the whole building, and formed at the same time a kind of capital to the pilasters; such a cornice may still be traced on the outer wall, and on the square pilasters at the back and sides of the palace. The roof was evidently flat, and formed an extensive terrace, to which staircases led from various parts of the edifice.

The ground-plan exhibits a chamber 28 feet 7 inches deep, and 20 feet 3 inches wide; the entrance is 44 feet in width, and is formed by an arch richly adorned with human busts, inclosed by a narrow frieze. The head-dresses of these figures, which are both male and female, are extremely varied and peculiar. They generally resemble those found in Persia on

\* Read at the Institute of Architects. See p. 549, under.